

December 1, 2011

Comment on hydrofracking -- DEC hearing, Ithaca, NY

Thank you for allowing me to speak. My name is Michael Gorr. I live in the town of Niles on Skaneateles Lake. My wife and I moved here from Illinois after we retired in 2006. We chose this area because it was not only affordable but one of the cleanest, most beautiful places in the country. Had we known then about the possibility of hydrofracking, we probably wouldn't have come. But now that we're here we intend to stay and to do everything we can to protect ourselves and our environment against this horrific threat.

The controversy about hydrofracking is sometimes presented as a case in which both sides have strong points and what the DEC needs to do is balance the legitimate concerns of the critics against the desires of those who support this practice because of its potential benefits. I want to explain why I believe that this is absolutely *not* the proper way to look at the issue. If gas drilling were simply a matter of economics, then such a cost-benefit analysis would probably make sense. The monetary gains to those who have signed drilling leases and the anticipated increase in new jobs would have to be weighed against (for example) the losses to such established industries as tourism, wineries, recreation and agriculture. But obviously there is far more at stake. Critics have painstakingly documented the severe health risks posed by contaminated water and contaminated air. No one -- including industry officials -- can deny that the hydrofracking process involves, for each well that is drilled, the injection of millions of gallons of fluids that are filled with known carcinogens, endocrine disruptors and neurotoxins. No one -- including industry officials -- can deny that much of this waste will return to the surface during and after the drilling process laced with additional contaminants (toxic heavy metals and radioactive materials). No one -- including industry officials -- can deny that millions of gallons of this stuff will not return immediately but will be in the ground for an indeterminate period. No one -- including industry officials -- can deny that all of the compressors, generators and heavy trucks will pour enormous amounts of highly toxic chemicals into our air. So it seems to me that no one -- including industry officials -- can deny that this whole process is *inherently hazardous*. But what should be the proper response of the community to a company that proposes to engage in an inherently hazardous activity? The answer is obvious -- the burden should be *on the company* to demonstrate, with hard scientific evidence, that they are prepared to take precautions that will be sufficient to reduce those risks to a reasonable level.

Have the defenders of hydrofracking met this burden? Surely if such scientific evidence were available, the enormously rich and powerful natural gas industry would have inundated us with it. Have they done so? Obviously not. Instead they have spent tens of millions of dollars on slick, empty ads on television and in the newspapers that repeat over and over their twin mantras that (1) natural gas is the clean energy alternative and (2) no one has proven that this form of drilling has ever contaminated a single well or aquifer. But even if these claims were true -- which they are not -- the burden shouldn't be on *us* to prove that we have been harmed by an inherently dangerous activity. Again, the burden should be on *them* to show they have taken

adequate precautions to insure that we will not not harmed. After all, we don't just routinely give people a green light to operate dynamite factories *until* someone has been hurt or killed -- we rightly insist that such companies show that they have instituted reasonable safety measures *before* we allow them to open their doors. Why shouldn't the gas industry be held to the same standards?

So when defenders of fracking argue that we need this industry because of the money and jobs it is supposed to generate, the proper response should be that all of that is strictly *irrelevant* since people's lives and health are at grave risk. You don't get to poison people because it will put some extra money in your pocket or give you a job -- otherwise there'd be nothing wrong with working for the Mafia.

On the first page of the DEC web site you will find the following as a central part of its mission statement:

"To conserve, improve and protect New York's natural resources and environment ... in order to enhance the health, safety and welfare of the people of the state."

We ask that the DEC honor that commitment by insisting that the gas industry *prove* that it can drill safely *before* issuing a single permit. Since the current version of the sGEIS does not do anywhere near enough to insure that the industry will meet that burden, it should be withdrawn and completely redone. Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Gorr", with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

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